

FORUM:	Special Conference
ISSUE:	Responding to Food Insecurities in Syria
STUDENT OFFICER:	Annie Jang
POSITION:	Deputy President of Special Conference

Introduction

Food insecurity is defined as a state of being unable to access to the decent amount of nutritious food due to lack of money and other necessary resources. The nine-year long Syrian crisis has led to extreme food shortages that significantly worsened the Syrians' quality of life. In Syria, there are currently over 6.5 million people that are severely food insecure; and an additional 4 million people are facing the risk of food shortage if the situation isn't taken under control, according to the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Syrian refugees are extremely vulnerable to the worsening state of food insecurity, as they only depend on emergency food assistance. The acuteness of the situation is caused by several factors such as a lack of financial and physical access to food, instability in Syria, and low livelihood. The issue of food insecurity in Syria will continue if not assisted properly.

Background

Massive food insecurity in Syria has worsened over the last few years. Before March 2011, Syria's economy had depended heavily on the agricultural sector, allowing for the trade between the neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, and other European countries. Up to 40% of the livelihoods in Syria are reliant on agriculture, as that is their primary



Severe Drought in Syria

source of income. However, after the Syrian crisis, the country has undergone drastic changes such as the refugee crisis (led to significant changes in land use and decrease in irrigation demand) and increase in average price of goods and services by 51%, which has resulted in severe food shortage of almost 80% of Syrian households.

There are several driving factors that have added to the decrease of agriculture and gradual rise in food prices that have caused people to suffer from starvation. First of all, the ongoing drought in Syria has damaged agricultural stability and ceased farmers from producing crops such as wheat and barley, which was later the reason for Syria to have food shortages. In addition to that, the resources mainly used for



agricultural production were ruined by the war, that resulted in farmers leaving the land and lacking the financial stability to support the farming activities. Moreover, as the agricultural sector was the leading factor for the Syrian economy, the breakdown of it caused a severe unemployment rate and food insecurity. Furthermore, the most vulnerable group in Syria affected by the food shortage is the Internally Displaced People (IDP), since they are unable to physically reach the humanitarian aid nor can they harvest their crops. Therefore, food insecurity will persist until these significant factors are addressed more efficiently by the Syrian government or other helpful organizations.

Problems Raised

Closing of Trade Borders

Due to the ongoing Syrian crisis, there is a lack of production in terms of agricultural products, and Syria has been forced to close its trading borders, which negatively impacted Syrian economy (led to high inflation and reduced the Syrian demand for goods and services) and extended beyond the border affecting the neighboring countries. For example, the former trade between Jordan and Syria has dropped three-fold both in import and export costs over the past six years. This phenomenon affected not only Syria, but also its neighboring partners that traded with Syria such as Jordan and Lebanon. Syrian farmers and exporters lost their trade route which has prevented them from earning additional income. Also, in this case, Jordan has suffered from the loss of a reliable food source that caused an increase in food prices and inflation. Thus, closing the trade borders and food shortage are interdependent issues which must be resolved to increase the quality of livelihood in Syria.

Malnourishment of people

As mentioned above, the notorious food shortage is affecting the nutritious level of both adults and children in Syria. 50% of families reduce their amount of food intake and 30% of adults have limited their food consumption for their children, which is a severe threat towards their health. Syrian families are also forced to send their children to work to increase their overall income and sell their household assets to buy food. Therefore, food insecurity is posing a threat to the health of the Syrian population.



Donations from MEDCs (USA, Japan, and Russia)

Thankfully, many MEDCs (More Economically Developed Countries) such as USA, Japan, and Russia have shown support to resolve the conflicts striking Syria through multiple donations. USA has donated \$135 million to WFP (World Food Programme) to help provide food to countries that need humanitarian aid. Recently, Japan donated \$175 million to support WFP operations. Through their donations, Syrian refugees in Lebanon were supported by receiving a sufficient amount of food. In addition, Russia was also involved in this issue by providing \$3 million to FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) to directly help farmers and herders in Syria. These donations are timely and well-appreciated by the Syrian community, since they are aimed at elevating the life-threatening conditions.

UNOs' (United Nations Organization) food shortage response

Many organizations worldwide have contributed their effort to resolve the consequences of the conflict in Syria. For example, WFP (World Food Programme) has organized practical projects such as providing 4 million people with monthly food rations as well as sending nutritious snacks to over 900 schools. They also arranged special nourishment for the breastfeeding mothers and their children. Moreover, FAO and



Syrians receiving food after 5 months without access to basic supplies

the European Union (EU) have collaborated and managed a project known as "Smallholder Support Programme for Agriculture Transformation." This project's main focus is to enhance smallholder farmers' capabilities to transform the agricultural sector and help them to produce crops by themselves. All these projects and actions have effectively assisted the Syrian population.

Key Players

FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization)

It is essential to notice the prominent work done by international organizations such as the FAO. FAO is a specialized agency of the United Nations that mainly exists to defeat hunger. This organization's primary objective within the integrated humanitarian response is to build resilience and focus on refugees and host countries involved in Syrian conflict through several actions tackling the questions such as food insecurity. The FAO does an incredible job to recover the food insecurity in Syria by providing employment opportunities for families, as well as supporting family farming and income generating



activities, enhancing natural resources such as food, water, and energy, etc. They also collaborate with other NGOs to create a food cluster and analyze data to teach people the necessary information to survive in this harsh situation.

Syrian Government

Undoubtedly, Syrian government plays a central role in this conflict. Syrian government is struggling to fully address the effects of the civil war such as significant food insecurity, agricultural and refugee crisis, massive economic loss, infrastructure damage, and rising budgets and loans due to its instability and corruption. The nine-year-long Syrian conflict between the Ba'athist Syrian Arab Republic and the groups opposing the Syrian government destroyed the economy and continues to drive humanitarian needs to the population. As a result of the civil war, around 5.6 million refugees have fled to Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, and other neighboring countries, yet still suffer from the impoverished life with low accessibility to basic humanitarian assistance. Statistically, 8 out of 10 people are currently living below the poverty line in Syria. Also, according to World Bank, the Syrian conflict has led to an economic loss of total \$226 billion in GDP. Thus, the government's action is required to return the refugees as soon as possible and resolve the poverty issue by recovering the economy from the crisis and wisely use the resources received from UNOs and NGOs.



Damaged infrastructure in Syria due to civil war

Possible Solutions

Reviving the agricultural sector by supporting more farm projects

As mentioned above, food insecurity in Syria is primarily caused by a decrease in agricultural activity. Therefore, tackling this issue by improving the productivity of the agricultural sector would be one of the effective possible solutions. Another applicable method is the creation of more farm projects supported by countries and organizations that involve works such as training the farmers, allowing farmers to continue their trading activities, and reconstructing the damaged infrastructure by the Syrian crisis.

It is crucial to give more farmers different opportunities to earn additional money, rather than solely relying on humanitarian assistance.



Support Syrian Farmers to continue their crop production



Humanitarian assistance reaching remote areas

Despite some progress made by organizations such as the UN's WFP in delivering humanitarian aid to the Syrian population, millions are still in need of humanitarian assistance, especially those living in remote areas. There are still many areas that lack sustained access to humanitarian aid which causes those groups of people to suffer from food shortages and starvations. Thus, it's crucial to reduce the risks by developing better security policies and ensure that those areas can also be able to access the necessary amount of food and support.

Glossary

Food Insecurity

Defined as a state of being unable to access to the decent amount of nutritious food due to lack of money and other necessary resources

WFP (World Food Programme)

The world's largest humanitarian organization part of the United Nations that mainly address hunger and promote food security

Humanitarian Assistance

Short-term help in the form of material assistance until government or institutions give long-term support



Sources

“Crisis in Syria.” *FAO and the Crisis in Syria: FAO in Emergencies*,
www.fao.org/emergencies/crisis/syria/intro/en/.

“Despite Reduced Hostilities in Syria, Millions Still Need Access to Aid, Top Humanitarian Affairs Official Tells Security Council | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13558.doc.htm.

“FAO and EU Enhance Smallholder Farmers' Capabilities to Transform the Agriculture Sector in the Syrian Arab Republic.” *FAO in Emergencies*, www.fao.org/emergencies/fao-in-action/stories/stories-detail/en/c/1195544/.

“Food Security Situation in Syria.” *Fss*, hno-syria.org/data/downloads/fss.pdf.

“Food Insecurity in War-Torn Syria: From Decades of Self-Sufficiency to Food Dependence.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, carnegieendowment.org/2015/06/04/food-insecurity-in-war-torn-syria-from-decades-of-self-sufficiency-to-food-dependence-pub-60320.

“Food Assistance Fact Sheet - Syria | Food Assistance.” *U.S. Agency for International Development*, 25 Apr. 2019, www.usaid.gov/syria/food-assistance.

“Impact Analysis of a Food Security and Resilience Program in Syria - ISDC - International Security and Development Center.” *ISDC*, isdc.org/projects/monitoring-and-impact-analysis-of-the-bmz-and-eu-funded-fao-resilience-programme-in-syria/.

“Japan Helps WFP Provide Vital Assistance to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.” *World Food Programme*, www1.wfp.org/news/japan-helps-wfp-provide-vital-assistance-syrian-refugees-lebanon.

“Overview.” *World Bank*, www.worldbank.org/en/country/syria/overview.

“Time to Start Fighting Syria's Chronic Food Insecurity.” *Arab News*, 8 Apr. 2019, www.arabnews.com/node/1479491.

“The Russian Federation Donates \$3 Million to Boost Food Security and Nutrition in Syria - Syrian Arab Republic.” *ReliefWeb*, reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/russian-federation-donates-3-million-boost-food-security-and-nutrition.



Sustainable Food Trust. “A Resilient Food System for Syrians.” *Sustainable Food Trust*,
sustainablefoodtrust.org/articles/a-resilient-food-system-for-syrians/.

